

# RSAA JOURNAL

Romanian Studies Association of America

Special Guests:

**Adriana Gradea & Richard Garrett**



**Adriana Gradea** is a Ph.D. candidate in English Studies at Illinois State University, specializing in visual rhetoric and cultural theory. She graduated from “Romulus Ladea” Visual Arts High School in Cluj-Napoca, Romania (1986). She has a BA in English and Romanian from “Babes-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania (1992), a Graduate Certificate in Advanced International Studies from The Johns Hopkins University in Bologna, Italy (1994), and an MA in English from Bradley University (2010). Her research and teaching interests are in visual, spatial, and cultural rhetorics, material culture, postcolonialism, and post/totalitarian studies. Her works have been published in *Rhetoric Review*, *Illinois English Studies Bulletin*, *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, *Euphemism*, *Narrative Magazine*, and *Fine Lines*, and she has two articles forthcoming in an edited collection and a special issue of *Film Criticism*, respectively. Her article

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**Richard Garrett** has a Ph.D. in medieval comparative literature from the University of Iowa. He has worked for ten years at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, where he is a senior lecturer of English. He enjoys teaching in the university’s exchange program with South Central University for Nationalities in Wuhan, China, where he spends a few weeks every summer. Dr. Garrett lived in France for two years, where he taught EFL and other English courses at schools in Paris and Rouen. He spent a year and a half as a Fulbright Scholar in Moldova from 2012-14.

At the American Center in Chisinau, he created a permanent reading group and organized in collaboration with the Moldova State University’s American Research Center numerous round tables for the academic year.

He also participated in the annual conferences of the ARC and the round table

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## Adriana Gradea: Biography (2)

"Embroidered Feminist Rhetoric in Andrea Dezso's *Lessons from My Mother*," published in *Rhetoric Review* in 2014, received the 2014 Florence Howe Outstanding Feminist Scholarship Award from the Women's Caucus of the Modern Language Association.

A promising young scholar, her article "Communist Romania's Authoritarian Discourses and Practices in Romanian New Wave Cinema." appeared as a chapter in *Commanding Words: Essays on the Discursive Constructions, Manifestations, and Subversions of Authority*, Lynda Chouiten (ed.), Cambridge Scholars Publishing (May 2016).

She has also published creative essays. For "Thirteen Ways of Looking at Cluj" she received the best essay award at the James

Ballowe contest of Bradley University, Peoria, IL.

Three other essays by Adriana can be found in the literary magazine *Euphemism* (Illinois State University).

In this issue we publish one of her fiction stories, "The Unbearable Light of a Saturday Afternoon," rooted in a real life experience.

Besides writing and teaching, she is an editor for Taylor and Francis, a wife and proud mother, and a dedicated contributor to Romanian Studies in the diaspora community.

Adriana is also a new RSAA member, the 2016 chair of the Romanian Forum (an MLA group), and a contributor to the special issue ***Romanian Values, Spirituality and the Global Challenge*** that is to be published in 2018.

### Adriana Gradea

#### ***The Unbearable Light of a Saturday Afternoon***

Walking through the downtown of an American small town, her parents beside her on their first visit to the New World, she enjoyed the sunny day. She wanted to show them the American way of life, or as much as she understood of it. She'd been there a short time. At the street level, there wasn't much to do or show her parents in that town, especially on foot, but because during the week they stayed in while she was at work, the weekend was a good time to wander around. So that Saturday, she picked the nicer part of downtown for exploration.

The warm sunlight was pouring down in waves. They came around a tall church. In the quiet street's golden light, few people were passing by. At that particular moment, they were probably talking about her new job, or maybe her father was arguing about the difficulty of the English language for the hundredth time. "It makes no sense, don't you see? Why would people write something and read

something else? To make it difficult? What did you say? "Zeh"? "Teh"?" He liked to crook his mouth and stick his tongue out in an effort to show her how irrational it was for hard words containing the "th" sound to even exist in any language. She remembered how, years before, when she was an undergraduate student in English, he'd often made fun of the word "Macbeth," purposefully pronouncing it with a raspberry at the end just to annoy her. Or maybe they were simply walking, saying nothing at that particular moment, trying to ignore how deserted the streets were, so unlike European streets while still similar in the way the old houses were guarded by lined-up mature trees. They took in the calm spring day with yearning, as if sunbathing, mainly looking for things that were alike rather than different from their hometown across the globe. Spring was warm and pure, and they enjoyed it finding it sort of familiar.

## **Adriana Gradea: *The Unbearable Light of a Saturday Afternoon* (2)**

"Excuse me, young lady," a man's voice said out of the blue. The voice came from nowhere, right after they crossed a small street and entered a residential neighborhood. He almost fell out of the sky, she thought. Turning her head to the right, she saw him standing at the street corner.

She was surprised to see him standing there. Later, she wondered how long he'd been waiting for someone to pass by. Her parents' presence beside gave her a sense of security. Growing up, they were good at shielding her, their only child, from life's imperfections. They'd always given her wise advice and the understanding she needed, guiding her through life with sane judgment and unconditional love, rarely truly deserved but necessary for artists to be. And they had all the answers. "Be yourself," was her mother's best advice. "Be smart. The world is full of stupid people," was her dad's. She always had trouble reconciling these. Suddenly, she remembered that, though she was their only child, they'd let her, indeed encouraged her to go half the way across the world, trustingly. Living up to their expectations and love had always made her want to become a better person. How would she ever be grateful enough?

"Excuse me, again, young lady. I'd like to ask a favor of you, if possible," said the same voice.

But her gaze went right through the man, as she wasn't ready to acknowledge him yet. Still thinking about the unexpected revelation growing in her lately, about filial feelings—and about life in general and what was to come—it dawned on her that the roles were starting to reverse. She constantly had to interpret and translate for her parents, explaining the New World; they depended on her for everything. They couldn't be her support anymore, but she was becoming theirs, and a day was approaching when they would count on her entirely. She was almost thirty, yet none of them was ready for the reality that she wasn't their little girl anymore. They were proud she'd followed her dream, even though she knew it hadn't found her yet. Had she given up everything for nothing? If it was for material things, she didn't have them yet. Where was it all leading? Will she have the

life she'd hoped for? What was she supposed to do with her life? How would she make a difference?

After the moments it took her to think of all these things she found so important and rather life-changing, her eyes finally focused on the man in front of her. He was determined to bring her down to the dust level of the quiet street.

"Could you please come into my house and just turn on the light?" asked the man in a timid, calm voice, somewhat embarrassed. Before she could notice his attire or open her mouth to answer, she thought he had some nerve! Maybe he was joking . . . To turn on his light!? Why couldn't a healthy, grown man turn on his own light? How was she even going to translate and explain this to her parents? Crazy man.

Attempting a smile, almost scared with the absurdity of it all, she asked slowly: "Why can't you do it yourself?" She looked at him closer, in suspicion, and saw a tall, thin, dark, bearded man, dressed in black. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw he had a small hat-like thing on his head, but before she could think, he spoke again.

"It's my religion. It's the Sabbath today. Really, if you could just come in and turn the light on, that's all. It would mean a lot to my family. It would only take a minute."

She stood still and fixed him with her stare. Time expanded for that long moment while it took her to realize what was happening. A step away from her, to the left, her parents were patiently waiting to find out what was going on.

"Sure," she said abruptly. "Sure. I'll do it."

She told her parents to come and wait for her outside the house.

The tall, calm man pointed to his house, which was right there, on the corner lot of the alley, by the intersection where they stood. A mere few steps away, the

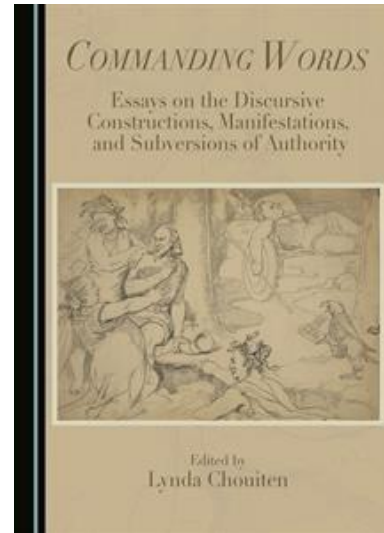
## Adriana Gradea: *The Unbearable Light of a Saturday Afternoon* (3)

house looked tall and heavy, with a black wrought-iron fence in front. She climbed the few stairs and entered a spacious foyer through enormous doors. The foyer was bigger than her bedroom of her first apartment in Queens, she thought. On the floor, a classic rug lay in tones of blue, on which a miniature dog was acting important, amusingly running around and making noises. The house smelled like honey mixed with cinnamon. The entrance door remained open as she stepped into the kitchen, some more steps to the left. There, a beautiful family in the rather dark room was sitting quietly at the large, set table. There was no window in the large kitchen. Light was coming in faintly from the living room yards away, traveling through enormous space, and barely reaching them in their seats. The living-room windows were shaded by tall trees, which made the house seem even darker than otherwise. The man's wife was sitting there, together with three children, the smallest of which still in a high-chair. The wife---a young woman with light-brown hair, no makeup, and a genuine look---turned her face from the baby to see the woman entering the kitchen space. All these people were waiting in silence and hoped for the light to be turned on by someone so they could have their dinner. As if in a trance, she felt a spotlight on herself as everyone waited patiently for her to play her part. She felt like in a French film, with no music, but she couldn't take her eyes away from the scene. The calm displayed by those people, their naturalness, as well as the stillness of the house overwhelmed her, forcing her to open her eyes in search for every detail of that special moment. A second later, by the turn of the switch, she allowed the light into that family's kitchen and house. Once on, the light made things seem slightly different, but it revealed a simple family in a simple house about to have their Saturday dinner. She smiled politely, and after exchanging a couple of polite phrases, she left.

She was back in the street, into the afternoon, where warm sunrays were coming down like rain, in straight yet oblique lines, through the leaves of the old trees lining up along the alley. Her parents were quietly waiting for her, steps away. She told them

what she had to do, as they unhurriedly resumed their walk.

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In a twenty-first century which celebrates freedom and equality while also beginning to question the lax attitudes and methods which have triumphed since the late Sixties, reflecting on the concept of authority is as necessary as ever. What role does, and should, authority play in political, social, and academic organization? Should one plead for stricter or more flexible authority? Where does the frontier between authority and authoritarianism lie? In examining these, and other related questions, this volume, postulating the interconnectedness between authority and discourse, also discusses the rhetorical strategies whereby authority is constructed, manifested, and resisted.

Pertaining to subjects as various as politics, culture, literature, history, and pedagogy, the twenty chapters which constitute this book offer an interdisciplinary, yet thematically coherent, coverage of the question under discussion, and encompass a wide historical and spatial scope, which ranges from the Islamic Middle Ages to twenty-first century America, passing through nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, India, and North Africa on the way.

<http://www.cambridgescholars.com/commanding-words>

## Richard Garrett: *Moldovan Diaries* (1)

“Travelling outgrows its motives. It soon proves sufficient in itself. You think you are making a trip, but soon it is making you—or unmaking you.”

--Nicolas Bouvier, *The Way of the World*

Before my Fulbright experience in Moldova, from 2012-2014, I had travelled abroad fairly extensively and had lived, and taught, abroad for almost three years, but it was my experience in Moldova that, more than any other, “made me,” as Bouvier so aptly writes in his classic travel book. I spent a year and a half as a teaching Fulbright Scholar in Chisinau, Moldova, and this experience continues to shape me professionally and personally.

My tenure as a Fulbright Scholar in Moldova deepened my international outlook and extended my role as an American working closely with the local population, instilling, but also acquiring, fresh ideas and strengthening partnerships between the US and other countries. I loved my experience in Moldova and became close to many of the people I met there. The Fulbright’s guiding principle is to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries, and I think my experience in Moldova successfully reflected that philosophy. I certainly learned a great deal in this mutually beneficial endeavor.

I arrived in Moldova in August 2012, accompanied by my wife Catherine Douillet, also a recipient of a Fulbright grant to Moldova the same year, and my two young children, ages two and four at the time. We thought we would be staying ten months, the length of our grant. But after about eight months in Moldova, we were so enthralled with our lives there that we requested an extension of our grant. Fortuitously, both the State Department and University of Wisconsin-Platteville granted us a five-month extension, enabling me to complete some of

the work I had begun at my host institution, Moldova State University in Chisinau.

It was my good fortune to be assigned to *Universitatea de Stat din Moldova*. USM, as its name suggests, is a public institution and the largest university in Moldova. Specifically, I worked at the American Studies Center of Moldova (on campus), and I worked closely with its director, Dr. Elena Crestianicov, who is also the Chair of the Department of Germanic Languages at USM. During my tenure there I taught Academic Writing to both undergraduate and master’s students, and also Masterpieces of English Literature to a class of third-year English majors. Perhaps the highlight of my university teaching in Moldova was an American Literature and Culture course to master’s students. Teaching this course and these students was significant because it enabled me to be actively involved in resurrecting the moribund Master’s Program in American Studies at USM.

Working in tandem with Professor Crestianicov and the staff at the American Studies Center, I enjoyed helping to revive the master’s degree in American Studies, which, due to lack of students and thus lack of funding, had been discontinued for the previous four or five years. My two main responsibilities in this effort were to recruit new students into the program and to help develop a new curriculum, adding new courses to the program. Fortunately, we succeeded in enrolling a new cohort of strong students, many of whom I personally recruited into the program. About half the students in the new cohort had been in my Masterpieces of English Literature course the

## Richard Garrett: Biography (2)

presentations/discussions organized with other Fulbright colleagues at the Institute for International Relations and the Moldova Free University (Fall, 2013). Dr. Garrett’s research interests include Translation Studies, and he has recently written articles on Geoffrey Chaucer and William Caxton as translators. Currently he is working on a project comparing academic dishonesty in Moldovan and American universities. Dr. Garrett wrote a special essay for the RSAA in which he shares his experience in the Republic of Moldova.



## Richard Garrett: *Moldovan Diaries* (2)

previous semester. It was certainly rewarding to see these students continue their education and pursue a graduate degree. I still keep in contact with a few of them and am happy to hear about their new careers since their graduation in December 2015. While some have landed positions in Chisinau with international organizations such as IREX, others have established themselves with major corporations in the United States.

In addition to my assigned courses, I served as a guest lecturer for a number of classes at my host university, including courses in Translation Studies and in the History of the English Language. My primary responsibilities as a Fulbright grantee were to teach these writing, literature, and language classes at USM, and while teaching university students in a traditional classroom setting was certainly rewarding, it was a different kind of teaching, in fact, that I found most gratifying. One of the joys of being a Fulbrighter in a small, somewhat obscure country like Moldova was that we three or four US Fulbright Scholars there felt like the proverbial big fish in a small pond. As an American academic, native English speaker, and English professor/instructor, I was flooded with opportunities to speak to Moldovans and to work with them in a wide variety of settings. To provide just a few examples, I taught evening writing, TOEFL, and vocabulary workshops to small groups of high school and university students in the Educational Advising Center of Moldova; I led, along with my wife Catherine, a monthly English book club for local community members at the American Resource Center, part of the US Embassy; I led numerous writing and teaching workshops at various locales throughout Chisinau; and I hosted a weekly English conversation group with some of my university students.

One of the amazing things about being an American Fulbrighter in Moldova was the impromptu and indeed serendipitous character associated with some of these teaching or speaking opportunities. One such incident occurred at a downtown library one evening, where my wife and I were attending an

“International Youth Night” event in which young (generally high school-aged) Moldovans were presenting some projects they had created related to their recent stays in other countries. I noticed a young woman there with an “Iowa Hawkeyes” logo on her backpack and, being an alumnus of the University of Iowa, I struck up a conversation with her. A few minutes later this young woman, who was a regular volunteer at the Speranta Center for disabled youth in Chisinau, had arranged for me to give a talk on “anything American” or “anything English” at the center a few days later. This speaking engagement turned out to be an amazing experience, as a group of about twenty disabled children and teenagers, most with excellent English comprehension and speaking skills, sat in rapt attention to my informal talk, enthusiastically asking me countless questions about American life and culture. This memorable experience is just one example of numerous presentations, projects and other opportunities in Moldova that seemed to just magically materialize for me. Another young Moldovan, a student in my writing and vocabulary workshops at the Educational Advising Center, approached me after class one day and arranged a radio interview in which my wife and I spoke live to a local talk-show host on a major Moldovan radio station.

The Moldovan people, despite living in arguably the poorest nation of Europe, are nonetheless passionate about life. They love festivals, dancing, music, and art. They are *gurmand* and justly proud of their food and particularly, their incredible wine, which is one of the world’s best-kept secrets. Indeed the Moldovan food, such as the mamaliga, a Romanian dish, and borsch from Russia, is emblematic of a fascinating Romanian-Russian cultural/linguistic divide in Moldova. The politics of language in Moldova are fascinating.

Most Moldovans are bilingual Romanian and Russian. As children most Moldovans learn these languages sequentially rather than simultaneously, with the majority speaking Romanian as their first language.

### Richard Garrett: *Moldovan Diaries* (3)

Romanian is the official, state language (the “Moldovan” language is, essentially, Romanian), but on the streets one is just as likely to hear Russian as Romanian. And thus it should come as no surprise that while numerous Moldovans identify with Romanian culture, many others identify with Russian culture. This rift is palpable and fraught with tension, as many Moldovans proudly manifest their pro-Russian sympathies in the face of compatriots who unabashedly side with Romania and thus Europe and the EU.

As an illustration of these cultural/linguistic battle lines, I can provide an interesting personal anecdote: one evening I telephoned a taxi service in Chisinau and reserved a cab for a trip across town. When the taxi arrived I got in the car and started to explain to the driver, in my halting Romanian, where I wanted to go. The driver angrily interrupted me and said, in Russian, that I should speak Russian and made it clear that he wasn’t going anywhere until I did. Although I could understand a bit of Russian and thus could generally make out what he was telling me, I could speak only a few words of Russian. So I decided to speak in English. When the driver realized after a few words that I was a tourist and not a Moldovan, his demeanor changed completely, he became quite friendly, and he immediately drove me to my destination.

This scene succinctly exemplifies the linguistic conflict that continues to roil the Moldovan people. Language in Moldova is not only fraught with nationalistic concerns but also marked by gender politics. It has also become a vexing problem vis-à-vis gender relations. As an English professor teaching language, literature, and writing, most of my students in Moldova were, as one might expect, women. A few of my brightest, most ambitious students expressed frustration with the Romanian language, saying, for example, “the language has not kept up with the times” and “it doesn’t match our everyday reality.” They underscore the point that, in recent years, with more and more women graduating from university and achieving prestigious professional positions, the Romanian language, particularly its lexicon, with numerous gendered nouns, has presented some difficulties. On the one

hand, such words as *prefect* (prefect), *comisar* (commissioner), *primar* (mayor), and *critic* (critic) are used only in masculine gender in Romanian, and simply do not have a feminine form, suggesting that these referents traditionally weren’t considered as possible women’s occupations. On the other hand, there are certain words in Romanian that have only feminine gender, for example, *bonă* (nurse), *soră de caritate* (medical attendant), or *moașă* (birth attendant). Just looking into the words, we can draw a picture of how the roles, historically, were divided between men and women.

In the domain of education, all the high-ranking positions at the University have only masculine gender: *decan* (dean), *prodecan* (vice-dean), *prorector* (vice-principal), *adjunct* (deputy), *rector* (principal), *lector superior*, *lector* (lecturer), *docent* (assistant professor), *doctor în doctor habilitat* (doctor of science), etc. When I asked some of my female colleagues, professors at USM, how they would like to be addressed, they responded that they definitely wished to be addressed in the masculine gender, because it accorded them more status. Moreover, now in Moldova one sees the interesting paradox of feminine titles used in conjunction with masculine nouns, such as *doamna director*, *doamna avocat*, etc.

Indeed it is this paradoxical nature of Moldova that is part of its appeal, with strong traditions going back to the time of its legendary national hero Stefan cel Mare (late 15<sup>th</sup> century), yet passionately struggling to emerge from and throw off its archaisms, engaging in globalization and the post-modern world. One striking example of this cultural tug-of-war can be seen in an excursion I took during my final weeks in Moldova. A young woman who was one of my master’s students at USM, an aspiring professor, invited me and my wife to her home (where her parents lived) in a village about an hour’s drive from Chisinau. We took a bus that dropped us off about two kilometers away from her home. As we walked along the slushy, sodden roads of the village that cold December day, and I observed the dilapidated houses and shops interspersed with one or two old Orthodox churches, I was struck by the incongruity of this young, well- educated woman, a future

## Richard Garrett: *Moldovan Diaries* (4)

professional, dressed very fashionably and elegantly in her tailored, brightly-colored dress and high heels, the way most of my university students there dressed, gingerly stepping through the rubble-strewn, muddy paths and roads of her gray village. This sense of incompatibility grew even stronger when we arrived at her home, marked by no running water and an outhouse. Yet the dinner she and her parents provided for us was sumptuous.

This country that most call the poorest in Europe is nonetheless rich in so many ways—richer indeed than its wealthy Western counterparts. My family and I treasured our time there, delighting in the many simple yet marvelous places, experiences, and opportunities that Chisinau afforded us but our American hometown cannot. Thus perhaps it is appropriate to close with the following anecdote: a couple of days ago, on a warm weekend afternoon, my eight- and six-year-old daughters and I were driving around town, searching for an ice-cream parlour that was open, but to no avail. We finally ended up going, I must admit, to McDonalds for ice cream. Before that, as we approached the doors of a parlour to see if it was open, my eight-year-old daughter summed it up best when she asked, somewhat incredulously, “But Papa, why do we have to go *inside* to get ice cream? In Moldova all we had to do was walk to the Central Park and we could buy ice cream there any time we wanted!”

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**Photos:** After School Book Club: *The Namesake*



**Below:** Dr. Garrett at the Capriana Monastery with spouse Catherine Douillet and fellow Fulbrighters.

